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ABSTRACT

Two areas in which the impact of economic crises on women's employment in the Great Depression of 1930 and during the 1970's and 1980's appear to be similar are examined: (1) the actual changes in female employment; and (2) the ideological campaigns and policies generated and/or reinforced, especially by the federal government, blaming women for male unemployment. In both periods of economic crisis, women's employment increased. The numerical increase, however, does not carry with it a commensurate increase in status, pay, and power for women. Women are pushed farther down the occupational hierarchy. During both periods hostility is expressed against women for taking jobs away from men; however, this hostility is expressed in different ways. During the Great Depression, propaganda campaigns and government intervention pressured women to leave the labor force altogether. In the 1970's and 1980's the message was one of putting women back in their place--a subordinate position to men, whether in the labor force or at home. The current hostile forces against women's employment blames women for upheavals in the family and in the labor market. (RM)

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The Impact of Economic Crises on Women's Employment: A Comparison of the Great Depression (1930s) and the Current Crisis (1970s-1980s)

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The Impact of Economic Crises on Women's Employment:
A Comparison of the Great Depression (1930s) and the Current Crisis
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Like many people, I had always assumed the Great Depression of the 1930s was a unique and very difficult period in the lives of my parents and grandparents--and that I lived in a much different, a "better" age. Women, in particular, I had thought, are clearly better off than during the Depression as we go through the current economic crisis.

To be sure, vast differences do exist today in comparison to the 1930s, as we struggle through another economic crisis:

- Women constitute a much larger number (almost 50 million) and greater percentage (43%) of the labor force today than during the Depression (only 10½ million and 22%, respectively, in 1930).

- Women are a much more integral part of the labor force today than in the Depression--throughout the life cycle, from all sectors of the society, and from all family types.

- There is much greater legitimacy today of female employment for married as well as non-married women.

- There is greater acceptance of wives' and mothers' paid employment, especially as the so-called family wage increasingly eroded since the 1960s.

- The second wave of the women's movement beginning in the 1960s is of strategic importance during the current period. Moreover it has diffused, in important ways, throughout the entire society--albeit in different ways in different sectors of the society.

- There is an increasing feminization of the proletariat in the current period--here and abroad--as well as internationalization of the sex division of labor.

- There is an important difference in the types of economic transformations occurring in each period. In the 1930s, the transformation was from a more rural to a more urban labor force and was national in scope. Today's economic crisis is more global in scale and involves an internationalization of both workers and capital.

- Finally, the differences in social support systems are dramatic. While today there are a wide variety of federal institutions that attempt to stabilize the economy and prevent the outright havoc of the 1930s, there was simply no federal support system in place during the Depression.

However, despite these remarkable differences, as I read about women's work and family lives during the Depression, I was struck by how amazingly similar are some of the employment, unemployment and unwaged home experiences of women in today's economic crisis (1970s and 1980s) with their older sisters. In fact, even though each period of crisis is grounded in its own historical material reality, I had the uncomfortable sense that much of history <u>was</u> repeating itself in the United States today--even though much has changed. As a sociologist, increasingly impressed by the importance of historical analysis for understanding women's work in the United States today, I became strikingly aware of how many of the underlying similarities have been overlooked, downplayed, or simply ignored by analysts of contemporary society and how we could possibly learn about the lives of women today by looking at women in the Depression.

Although I focus on the similarities and associated differences of the impact of these two periods of economic crises on women's work, it is clear that a more thorough analysis that integrates better the

complexity of each period and the contradictions emerging in each for women would better reflect a more total picture of what happens to women during economic crises. My goal in this paper is to stimulate discussion and raise questions about the issues generated in the below analysis. Most importantly, I hope this leads to the development of a more coherent understanding of what happens to women in economic crises in the United States and how to change it for the better.

Several years ago I was asked to review a book on the impact of the Great Depression on married women's work and family life (see Sokoloff, in press, reviewing Scharf's, 1980, To Work and To Wed). As I read that book (and later other materials) I was struck by the fact that the same erroneous questions are found or implied in the media today about the relationship between women's employment and economic crisis as were half a century ago. For example, then as now, people asked such misleading questions as: How do women take jobs away from men? During an economic crisis, isn't it understandable that male breadwinners' jobs should be protected over women's, especially if the woman is married and living with her husband? Since the economic crisis hits heavy industries and thus male employment more severely, shouldn't we concentrate on improving the economic situation for men and stop worrying about women?--i.e., today that translates into let's put affirmative action on hold for now.

However, reading about the Depression period stimulates us to ask a whole new set of questions about the contemporary economic crisis and its impact on women: What is it about the nature of work in this country that has increased women's employment so dramatically over time, but in low wage, low status jobs--and continues to do so during these

periods of economic crises? At what point in an economic crisis does women's employment become more seriously threatened? In what ways does this threat manifest itself? Why does women's overall employment level keep increasing during economic crises at the same time that vociferous ideological campaigns try to create the atmosphere that women's place is back in the home and/or farther down the occupational hierarchy than currently exists? How are the experiences of women from different racial/ethnic and class backgrounds similar and different in each of these areas? And how do we make sense of these differences in trying to understand how women and families with different material circumstances survive in an economic crisis?

In this paper I focus on only two of the many possible areas of comparison between the Depression and the current economic crisis as they impact on women: first, women's actual employment/unemployment experiences during economic crises and second, ideological campaigns generated against women's employment. However, this is not to say a more thorough review of the two periods would not find other and even more important areas of comparison.[1] In each case I will focus on the similarities and associated differences between the two periods of economic crises.

I. A COMPARISON OF WOMEN'S WORK IN TWO PERIODS OF ECONOMIC CRISIS

The major argument I will put forward in this paper based on comparing women during the Depression and the 1970s-1980s economic crisis is as follows: First, while women experience a large increase in unemployment and many women experience severe dislocation, the overall tendency is for women to increase, rather than decrease, their participation in the labor force during these two periods of economic crises. Second, this increase in employment during economic crises is part of a long-term secular trend where labor is rationalized, segmented, cheapened, and continually sex segregated--i.e., as a special demand for female labor. Moreover, women are increasingly forced into a position of downward mobility within the female job structure as the crisis intensifies.

Third, this is true despite covert and overt attempts by government and business (a) to control women's employment and (b) to blame women for male unemployment, artificially inflating unemployment, intruding on what is considered men's traditional turf, keeping men from newly created jobs (e.g., service jobs), and the like. Fourth, the anti-woman campaigns operate somewhat differently in each of the two periods. In the Depression, the virulent attacks against women are aimed at getting married women <u>out of</u> the labor force under the guise that these jobs would then be available to men. In contrast, in the 1970s-1980s economic crisis, attacks against women are less openly virulent but nevertheless quite apparent. Except for some of the New Right, these attacks are not aimed necessarily at sending women "back home." Rather,

their goal is to teach women to "know their place"--women's place being a subordinate position in the job market as well as at home.

II. IMPACT OF ECONOMIC CRISES ON WOMEN'S EMPLOYMENT

The first important area of disturbing similarity between the Depression and today to be discussed is the actual impact of the respective economic crises on many aspects of women's employment. In this section we will explore the following areas of similarity--despite certain important differences: (1) the increase in female unemployment, (2) the secular increase in female employment, (3) the rationalization of labor, (4) the sex segregated labor markets, (5) the downward mobility of women in the labor force, and (6) the question of the degree to which women are "protected" in an economic crisis.

High Levels of Female Unemployment

In both the Depression and the economic crisis of the 1970s-1980s, there is a significant increase in the rate of female unemployment. Although adequate data are not readily available for the 1920s (see Humphries, 1976; Milkman, 1976; Helmbold, 1981), between 1930 and 1940 women's official unemployment rate almost tripled from 4.2 percent to 13.6 percent (Norwood and Waldman, 1979).[2] During the contemporary period, female unemployment increases from 4.7 percent in 1969 (the year before the unemployment rates start to rise in the 1970s) to 10.0 percent in January, 1983. For black women the situation is much worse. While I was not able to get data for the Depression, during the current

crisis, black women's unemployment increased from 7.8 percent in 1969 to a high of 16.5 percent in 1983 (USDL, BLS, 1980; Monthly Labor Review, April 1984). If we keep in mind, in addition, the hidden underemployment and subemployment of women, we can see that in both periods women are faced with incredibly difficult tasks of keeping themselves and their families together--with increasing and bitter hardship for many poor, working class and racial/ethnic women.

Secular Increase in Female Employment

Based on these high unemployment rates, it has typically been assumed that women were far less likely to be employed--i.e., were more likely to be pushed out of the job market during an economic crisis than other points in time. This is true in terms of unemployment. However, the second similarity that exists in both periods of economic crisis is the contradiction that at the same time that women's unemployment increased, simultaneously women's overall employment did not decrease. Rather, women's employment increased as part of a long term secular trend throughout the 20th century that increasingly brings more and more women into the paid labor force.

Thus, even during the 1930s, when legislation was passed (e.g., 1932 Economy Act) that was intended to prohibit married women's employment on a large scale, their employment increased from 29 percent to 35.5 percent (Scharf, 1980). In fact, women's labor force participation increased during the Depression decade more than any previous decade (Milkman, 1976).[3]

Likewise, during the decade of the 1970s, despite such repressive proposals as the "Family Protection Act," and campaigns to defeat the

right to abortion, affirmative action, and the Equal Rights Amendment, an average of over a million women a year were added to the work force (Norwood and Waldman, 1979), with more women entering the work force during the 1970s than in any other previous decade in this century. Mothers with young children accounted for the greatest rate of increase over the decade. Thus, while in 1970, only 30 percent of mothers with children under 6 years old were employed, by 1983, for the first time, slightly over one-half of all such mothers were employed (U.S.D.L., BLS, 1980; "An American Majority of Working Mothers," 1984).[4] In short, in both periods, married women's employment (and later the employment of mothers of young children), along with all women's employment, kept increasing at the same time that women's unemployment rates rose and propaganda campaigns tried to define women as interlopers in a man's world.

Creation, Expansion and Rationalization of Cheap "Female" Employment

Third, the rationalization of labor, the cheapening of labor, and thereby the increase in female labor, occurred throughout the job hierarchy during both periods of economic crisis. Thus, in both periods, some important reasons for women's increased employment are similar: Prior to and during both the 1930s and 1970s-1980s, the creation of new jobs (clerical and service) and the rationalization of jobs (again clerical and service) are part of the process of the development and intensification of the specific period of monopoly capitalism under investigation (See Braverman, 1974; Oppenheimer, 1970; Davies, 1974; Kessler-Harris, 1982; Scharf, 1980; Dubnoff, 1979; Sokoloff, 1983; Urquhart, 1984). A demand for a large pool of cheap

(but educated) labor was created and women--on a large scale--neatly fit the bill. Defined as homemakers and treated as "secondary workers"--even when they are the sole support of themselves and their families--, justification for women's lower waged employment for newly created and continually rationalized jobs was acceptable. This process is embodied in the fact that women only earn about three-fifths of what men earn, on the average, at full-time and year-round employment (U.S.D.L., WB, 1980; Mellor and Stamas, 1982) and less than two-fifths of what men earn if both full-time and part-time work is included (AFSC, 1981). This was as true during the 1930s as today (Norwood and Waldman, 1979; Szymanski, 1976).

It is interesting to note, in this context, that during both the Depression and last year at the height of the current economic crisis, the gap between men's and women's wages decreases slightly. Thus, at one point during the Depression, full-time and year-round employed women averaged 63 percent of their male counterparts (Kessler-Harris, 1982) and 62 percent in 1983 (Pear, 1983a). However, the narrowing of the gap in both periods does not signal any celebration for women--or men for that matter--since an important reason for the "greater equality" is that men lose some their patriarchal privilege during economic crises; women do not increase their earnings. An important basis for women's greater "wage equality" during both periods of crisis was the fact that many men lost high paying male dominated jobs, especially in construction and manufacturing--thereby requiring they take lower paying jobs. This is hardly a benefit to either men or women.

In the earlier period, Scharf (1980) recognizes the deterioration of women's occupational status in both professional and nonprofessional

jobs when she points to the creation of less demanding and less prestigious jobs requiring less skill and experience as the dominant place for female employment by the time World War I began.[5] (See here also Kessler-Harris, 1982.) More recently, Dubnoff's (1979) analysis of female employment between 1940 and 1970 showed that women increased in jobs that were

> undesirable by every measure considered here. Females were deployed in occupations which were low in educational training and requirements, as measured by the functional nature of the work rather than educational attainment of incumbents, occupations which were low in complexity, low in autonomy, high in supervision, and above all in occupations which were low paid...(The women were so low paid that) the growth of women's employment was, above all, an expansion of low wage work, of work which does not pay the social costs of reproducing the next generation of workers...(i.e., does not pay for the cost of providing for a family) (pp. 17-18).

Analyses of the data for the 1970s and early 1980s as well as those projected through the mid 1990s indicate these trends continue through the current economic crisis and beyond as part of this long-term secular trend (Rothschild, 1981; Levin and Rumberger, 1983; Rumberger, 1981; Carey, 1981; Leon, 1982; Westcott, 1982; "Service Producing Industries...," 1981; Silverstri and others, 1983; Riche and others, 1983).

Sex Segregated Labor Markets

Fourth, in both periods, women are increasingly employed in a highly sex segregated labor market. In 1980 as well as in 1900 (and all throughout the 20th century), about two-thirds of all employed women (or men) would have to change jobs for men and women to be working in the same kinds of jobs (Gross, 1971; Blau and Hendricks, 1978; Burris and Wharton, 1982). This is true both in crisis and non-crisis periods.

Thus, the claims that women take jobs away from men are patently false (since they do not work in the same kinds of jobs). Moreover, men typically refuse employment in "women's" jobs--often because the wages are too low for them to survive on. The major exception to this is that men do appear to take "female" jobs but mainly in the highest levels of traditional female professions (teaching, social work, library work, even nursing, as well as today computer work) during economic crises, while women simultaneously experience <u>downward</u> mobility <u>within</u> the female job structure.

In short, women increase in the labor force during periods of economic crisis as part of a broader long-term secular trend where labor is rationalized, segmented, cheapened, continually sex-segregated--i.e., as a special demand for "female" labor, and as we discuss below, increasingly forced into a position of downward mobility within the female job structure as the crisis deepens.

<u>The Demotion of Women in Female Dominated Job Hierarchies</u>

In general, despite an ideology hostile to female employment (see Section III), actual trends show an increase in female employment. However, this numerical increase should not obscure the overall downward mobility of employed women during the Depression and the current economic crisis. The process of male incursion into higher level "female" jobs and the downward mobility of women in the "female" job hierarchies exists in a variety of places for the Depression period (e.g., see Milkman, 1976; Humphries, 1976; Scharf, 1980; Helmbold, 1981; Kessler-Harris, 1982[6]). One of the contributions I hope to make in this

paper today is to suggest that a similar process is occurring today and needs to be addressed by research analysts and policy makers alike.

a). The Depression

In terms of the Depression, for example, Scharf (1980) convincingly and infuriatingly demonstrates how as the Depression intensified, jobs in education disappeared. Yet, more and more men were able to enter the one place that educated women were previously able to find large-scale employment: in teaching (85% of all women professionals were teachers in 1920). Moreover, she reports how women in the higher levels of the educational and other professional (sometimes called semi-professional) female hierarchies were demoted to lower levels while men--unable to find work in traditional male employment spheres--were recruited into the higher positions in women's traditional areas of professional employment. In addition, with the decreased enrollment of students in the earlier grades, women's employment in education was severely diminished as men were recruited to teach at the junior high and high school levels where enrollment was increasing. Ironically, the struggle for jobs in education pitted single and married women against each other--causing even more severe dislocation for single than married women. While married women were blamed for this, it was men who actually became the beneficiaries of the limited teaching jobs available during the Depression. All this was a severe blow to women; and after the Depression women were unable to regain their higher statuses earned within the professions between 1910 and 1930--until perhaps, in some cases, as late as the 1970s! (See Scharf, 1980, for further analysis of this process of demotion in other professional areas.)

According to Nisonoff's (1984) analysis of the impact of plant closings during the Depression on women and families, a similar process of demotion occurs for high level, older, women industrial workers. They lose their high status jobs in the plant that took them so long to achieve, never to regain them again.

Finally, not only did men replace women in the higher status "female" professional and industrial jobs, but, as Helmbold (1981) argues in her analysis of women's work in the Depression:

> When women lost jobs in relatively high status and high-paying occupational categories, more women were competing with one another for jobs at the very bottom which were the worst paid and the hardest work. This downward job mobility meant that the people whose job conditions were already the most depressed and who suffered from discrimination, faced even worse situations (p. 24).

In short, many women were not so much excluded from waged labor as they were demoted as a consequence of the Depression. Likewise, I believe, evidence exists to show that similar processes have been occurring during the current economic crises of the 1970s and 1980s. Let us turn to several different pieces of evidence that support this position.

b). Contemporary Economic Crisis (1970s-1980s)

First, in one study of male and female college graduates post World War II, Jaffee and Froomkin (1978) compared the early job experiences of those college graduates between 1950-1970 and 1970-1975 (the early period of the current economic crisis). They found that as female college graduates steadily increased their labor force participation between 1950 and 1975, in the later period (1970-1975) there had been a marked decrease in teaching jobs (the major place of employment for female college graduates) but not a commensurate increase in the number

of other professional, technical and managerial jobs for these women. Likewise, in the 5 year period between 1970 and 1975, female college graduates obtained lower paying entry jobs and had greater difficulty moving up the job ladder than during the previous 20 years. (Note that a similar pattern occurred for men too, but it was not so bad as for the women.) Instead, increases for college educated women have occurred in clerical and sales work, and somewhat in low-status service jobs. By 1975, only relatively few entered the more prestigious male dominated professions.[8] Moreover, for both college graduates and Ph.D's in the 1980s, approximately one-half are expected to be employed in jobs that are not equivalent to their years of training (Rosenbaum, 1979; Jaffee and Froomkin, 1978). In short, this does not represent a widespread desertion of women from the labor force during the early to mid 1970s, but rather a demotion of women from high status to lower status occupations.

In a second national survey, between 1960 and 1980, Levin and Rumberger (1983) found that as the number of college graduates (male and female) increased, the greatest numerical increase of jobs in the labor market were in those requiring fewer and more simplified skills, not in the high level, high technology fields the media promises will produce widespread opportunity for people today. The impact on women's employment is hardly uplifting. It points to demotion once again. Thus, according to an interview with Rumberger in the Chronicle of Higher Education (Magarell, 1983):

> 'By 1980, a greater proportion of young female college graduates were working in clerical jobs than 20 years earlier,' the Rumberger report says.
>
> 'While the 1960's had improved opportunities for women, declining opportunities in the 1970's all but eliminated those

gains.'

'Over all, female college graduates in 1980 were worse off than graduates in 1960.'

As for the future, Mr. Rumberger says, projections indicate that only 28 percent of new jobs in the 1980's will be in professional and managerial occupations, compared with 36 percent during the 1960's and 45 percent during the 1970's.

'These figures,' he says, 'paint a much less optimistic picture of future employment opportunities than frequently appear in the mass media, where the belief is propagated that high-technology will foster the growth of jobs in technically related areas' (p. 12).

Of the top 20 jobs expected to provide the largest number of jobs for workers in the 1980s, only teaching and nursing required a college education! (Rumberger, 1981).

Third, to complete the discussion of the demotion of female professionals, predictions are that continuing declines in teaching opportunities for college-educated women today will mean that "increasing proportions of women graduates will start, and probably end, their careers in clerical jobs" (Jaffee and Froomkin, 1978, p. 20). Fourth, as college educated women start to bump lower educated and poor women from their now traditional employment in clerical and service work, these women will be faced not only with having to find low level blue-collar and service jobs, but with high rates of unemployment. For example, see the high unemployment rates for Black men, women and teens already (see Monthly Labor Review's section on "Current Labor Statistics" in those issues between 1970 and 1984). Fifth, Feldberg (1984) reminds us that, just as Nisonoff (1984) reported for the Depression, other researchers[9] have found women who work in the higher levels of traditional female industrial work today (like electronics and

textiles) end up in much lower paying jobs as they are "bumped down" the industrial occupational hierarchy during the current economic crisis.

Finally, that men have increasingly entered the higher levels of women's traditional professions can be found for the contemporary period too (for summaries of a variety of studies see Grimm and Stern, 1974; Blau and Hendricks, 1978; Fox and Hesse-Biber, 1984; Purnick, 1984).

In a preliminary analysis of national data,[10] I have compared men's and women's entrance into male-dominated professional-technical jobs vs. female-dominated professional-technical jobs between 1970 and 1980. These data show there is little change in the proportion of white women professional-technical workers employed in the elite male professions between 1970 and 1980 (about 1/10 white women professionals in both years)[11] or the traditional female professions (or so-called semi-professions--about 1/2 women professionals both years). Where white women increase over the decade in professional-technical jobs is mainly as lower status female technicians (4% to 10%) and in low status male technicians jobs (2% to 7%). White males, on the other hand, make gains primarily in female semiprofessions (6% to 11%), as do black males (12% to 24%) and in male technicians jobs (13% to 18%). (With certain important variations, the trends for blacks are similar to whites, but in all cases consequences for black professional-technical workers appear worse than for respective male and female white professional-technical workers.)

These data tell us only the degree to which men and women in the professions find work in each others' traditional occupational categories. Further analysis is needed to see at what particular level in each of the gender dominated occupational hierarchies men and women

enter. Based on earlier findings (see Fox and Hesse-Biber, 1984, for a summary of these studies in the professions; see Feldberg and Glenn, 1980, for an analysis of several clerical hierarchies), my guess would be that men enter the higher levels of female dominated professional-technical jobs and women enter the lower levels of male-dominated professional-technical jobs as the job market continues to be transformed during the current economic crisis. (For a study that looks at the transformation of several high status male dominated professions with increasing female representation in these rationalizing professions, see Carter and Carter, 1981.) This would probably intensify the process of demotion for women throughout the occupational hierarchy. (Also, see here Sokoloff, 1984.)

A final note of caution must be added here. The so-called "bump down" process does not necessarily operate for women from different class and racial/ethnic backgrounds in the same kind of way. While it is true that, e.g., black women are much more likely to be unemployed than white women both before and during the current economic crisis, it is also true that black women have increased their participation in clerical work as they have been able to escape some of the more arduous and less remunerative jobs held by them previously. This trend in clerical work seriously begins for black women only in the 1960s and continues throughout the current period of crisis, in large part due to the rationalization of clerical work (Feldberg and Glenn, 1977; Aldridge, 1975). The point here is that some women--in this case many black clerical workers--may experience a form of "upward mobility," made possible by the contradictory aspect that the entire occupation--

clerical work--is being downgraded through the rationalization process. Thus, while some groups of women are "bumped down" during the economic crisis, others experience very high unemployment rates, and still others experience a form of personal (as opposed to broader structural or occupational) upward mobility--depending on variations in class and racial/ethnic background.

In sum, in both the Depression and the current economic crisis women are not so much unemployed--although they do experience significantly higher unemployment rates than before the economic crisis and they do lose many jobs--as they are demoted within the female job hierarchy. Moreover, although men do not typically seek employment in "female" jobs, the major exception appears to be in the highest levels of traditional female high status occupations.

Economic Crisis and Women's Lower Unemployment

The final area of similarity between the Depression and today for working women has to do with their lower unemployment rates in comparison to men during a severe economic crisis and the question of their ability to be protected from unemployment because of their sex segregated jobs.

Contrary to the belief that women function as a reserve army of labor power--to be drawn on in periods of labor scarcity and expelled from the labor market in periods of labor surplus, Milkman (1976) found for the Depression and the downturn during the early-mid 1970s that women experienced a measure of protection during these two different periods of contraction.[12] That is, while women act as a reserve of labor during an expansionary period (such as in World War II), they do

not experience the same high rate of expulsion as men do during a period of contraction. This is not because of women's cheaper labor power than men, continues Milkman, but because of the rigid sex segregation of the labor force. As Milkman (1983) says, "In both periods (Depression and today), the unemployment rate was significantly higher for men than for women, because the occupations and industries in which men are concentrated--especially heavy manufacturing and construction--were affected most severely" (p. 1). (For the most recent data on the current economic crisis, see Nilsen, 1984.)

Thus, prior to the Depression and prior to the current economic crisis women have typically had higher unemployment rates than men. For the current period, the unemployment rate of women has been higher than that of men throughout the post World War II period, with a widening gap until the onset of the current crisis in the 1970s (Milkman, 1976). Since women and men work in sex segregated jobs and since heavy manufacturing and construction, typically male jobs, are hardest hit by these economic downturns, the rate of male unemployment in these industries is generally higher than women's unemployment in typically female industries (clerical and service). As the crisis deepens, not only do men experience higher rates of unemployment in these male dominated industries, but overall male unemployment actually goes higher than overall female unemployment. [For example, after the high male vs. female unemployment rate of the 1930s--4.7% female and 7.1% male unemployment in 1930--,[13] the post World War II male vs. female unemployment rates have always been higher for women until 1982. Thus, in 1950, 1970, and 1980, male and female unemployment rates are respectively: (1950) 5.1% men unemployed vs. 5.7% women unemployed;

(1970) 4.4% men unemployed vs. 5.9% women unemployed; (1980) 6.9% men unemployed vs. 7.4% women unemployed. Not until 1982 does male unemployment (9.9%) actually exceed female unemployment (9.4%) (Milkman, 1976; USDL, Bulletin 2080; Monthly Labor Review, April 1984)].

On the one hand, as Milkman concludes, sex typing of jobs seems to "protect" women more than men from unemployment in the current crisis in much the same way it did in the 1930s--despite vigorous urgings of women to leave the labor force, especially in the 1930s. Just as before, women are highly concentrated in clerical and service occupations and poorly represented in manufacturing. However, on the other hand, this situation seems highly contradictory to me and may not warrant the kind of optimism that others might infer from Milkman's analysis. There are, I want to argue, real threats to women's "protected" employment status during the current economic crisis.

In the first place, that this "protection" should not be overstated can be seen by the fact that while the rate of unemployment for men increases faster than the rate of unemployment for women during today's economic crisis, the overall female unemployment rate is very high. Thus, as we saw earlier, women increased from 5.9% unemployed in 1970 to 9.4% in 1982, the first time that women's overall unemployment was lower than men's (men increased from 4.4% to 9.9% respectively)--with black women doing twice as bad as white women. By February 1984, the first time that male unemployment does not exceed female unemployment, the overall unemployment for men and women in a so-called slightly "improving" economy is far higher (7.8%) than the rate in 1970 of 4.9%. (USDL, Bulletin 2080; Monthly Labor Review, April 1984, p. 63). Neither men nor women benefit from these exceedingly high unemployment rates.

Secondly, women in clerical and service jobs and traditional female professions, the places of greatest female employment, should not feel too safe with the economic transformations confronting them today. In the case of clerical workers, estimates vary from 20 percent to 46 percent of all clerical workers can expect to be unemployed or displaced by the new technologies, automation, and rationalization by the 1990s (see "Race Against Time," 1980; Moroney, 1984). All these projections are for non-U.S. western industrialized countries, since the U.S. government has refused to conduct adequate surveys and analyses to determine the impact of the new technologies and social relations of work which are projected to emerge and impact on clerical work (see "Race Against Time," 1980).

For service workers, where 20 percent of women but only 9.5 percent of men are employed in 1979 (Fox and Hesse-Biber, 1984), a prolonged crisis could mean "that this sector would suffer severe cutbacks and this would have a significant effect on the sex differences in unemployment" (Milkman, 1976, p. 92). Moreover, women professionals also face severe cutbacks, since they are far more likely than men professionals to be employed by the government (local, state and federal) than by private industry. This is even more true for black than white women (Shea et. al., 1970; Castillo, 1981; Anderson, 1982). And under the Reagan administration, the decision to decrease government employees is the first time for this to happen in a recession since World War II. Thus, while some professional and managerial women may benefit from some of the changes during the current economic crisis--especially in comparison to poorer women (see Powers, 1984; Burris and Wharton, 1982), at the same time, many of these higher status women's jobs are likewise

threatened. As we have learned in the previous section, these women may lose their jobs in the professions, but not be unemployed--only demoted!

Moreover, as Feldberg (1984) reminds us, women in the current economic crisis are placed in a double bind because of government cutbacks. On the one hand women's wages are more essential today; on the other hand, women's responsibilities for their families become more difficult because of the loss of services, which helped to employ women--both professional and nonprofessional--and had helped many working women be able to obtain the needed services to increase their employment. Thus, by cutting jobs for women and services for women and families, women today must struggle with both the loss of this state sector employment as well as many basic and essential opportunities for their families.

Third, and finally, it is certainly the case that women are a large and integral part of the paid labor force today--and are especially less marginal than during the Depression. Nevertheless, women's waged work is structured both as less permanent than men's and as secondary workers--with primary responsibility to family. In this sense, while women are less likely than men to be unemployed in an economic crisis, as Milkman argues, they are still in great risk of not being adequately employed and therefore not well "protected," especially in an economic crisis. In this regard I will discuss only one aspect of the many structural issues (here the question of women's permanence/marginality to waged labor force) that are important here: women's less than full-time and year-round employment.

People tend to make the mistake of thinking that since women are not marginal to the labor force today that most women work full-time.

In a sense, this is true. Thus, according to official BLS statistics, in 1980, 70 percent of all employed women worked "full-time." However, a closer look at the data teaches us that only 44 percent of all women work both year-round and full-time. (This is in sharp contrast to four-fifths of all men 25-54 years old.) (U.S.D.L., B.L.S., 1980). And that the greatest projected occupational increases in the 1980s are in those categories heavily female, lowest wage and part-time or less than full-time and year-round (e.g., Rothschild, 1981). [E.g., the greatest occupational increases projected for the 1980s were in low level service work. This is three-fourths "part-time" workers--as are sales workers. And clerical workers, the largest single category of female employment, is equally as likely to increase as sales work, and has only half of its workers on "full-time and year-found" jobs[14] (USDL, BLS, 1980). For a fuller review of this issue, see Sokoloff, 1981].

The consequences of inadequate full-time and year-round work for women who want/need it are profound for women and their families (for a summary of these problems, see Sokoloff, 1983). Here I want to emphasize that this type of employment (1) brings women into the labor force as an important but less integrated part of it than men, (2) keeps women's primary identity and responsibliity with the home, (3) maintains women's position as "secondary" workers and thus paid less than men--even when they are the only paid workers in the family, and with inadequate benefits, and (4) keeps women as much more "flexible" workers than men: e.g., hours may be decreased (or increased) without actually unemploying women, or women may be seen as more "movable" from one low status, poorly paid, "part-time" job to another.

In an essay that supports this line of thinking, Vicki Smith (1981) argues: "We need to rethink the notion that part-time work, as it is structured today, is purely a privilege for women, and begin to challenge this particular restricted type of employment as a further manifestation of the existing inequality between women and men in our society" (p. 124). This inequality, I would suggest, is an unequal basis through which women are probably not "protected" from "lesser" employment, as might be the case with sex-segregated labor.

III. HOSTILITY AGAINST WOMEN'S EMPLOYMENT

In this section I will discuss the second major area of similarity for women between the Depression and the economic crisis of the 1970s-1980s: that of hostility against women's employment. The cultural attitudes toward female employment will be discussed in two ways: first, in terms of the overt and covert policies and attempts by government in particular to control women's employment; second, in terms of how despite the ideological campaigns against women's employment being organized somewhat differently in each period, women are still blamed for much of the unemployment and many of the problems that occur during an economic crisis.

Overt and Covert Campaigns/Policies to Control Women's Employment

During the Depression, the government actively discouraged married women's employment in an attempt to preserve the available jobs for their husbands and other men. Blatant government (and later private

industry) discrimination against women, particularly through Section 213 of the 1932 Economy Act--the "married persons' clause"--prohibited both partners in a marriage from being employed by the federal government. This, of course, typically meant firing, retrenchment and demotion of wives, but not husbands. The only time husbands were reported to have left their jobs was so their wives would not lose their superior jobs (Scharf, 1980, p. 48; Humphries, 1976, p. 107).

Although the Act was eliminated in 1937, so strong was the anti-woman attitude in the country that between 1937 and 1939, 26 states initiated this type of anti-woman legislation on its own (Scharf, 1980). Not only did the government policy hurt married women in general, but it also was most forceful about excluding married women in high level government jobs. This rule, it has been argued, was far less likely to be applied to secretaries or wives of husbands working as secretaries earning less than $5,000 (Scharf, 1980; Humphries, 1976). Thus, as Scharf says, "Married charwomen who cleaned the schools were not subject to the furor that raged over the status of married women teachers" (p. 80). Or as Helmbold (1981) argues, "There was no objection to black married women doing housework in white women's homes. The objection was to higher status and higher paying jobs being occupied by (married) women" (p. 26).

Married women were discriminated against not only when employed by the federal government. In 1930-1931, 77 percent of some 1500 cities surveyed did not employ married women as new teachers and in more than 50 percent of the cities a woman teacher was dismissed as soon as she married. Private industry followed soon after the federal government in dismissing married women. Further, in addition to discrimination in

terms of employment, women were also discriminated against in terms of wages as well as availability and type of relief programs (see especially the National Industrial Recovery Act and New Deal Legislation) (Scharf, 1980; Humphries, 1976).

Today, policies to limit women's employment are not so publicly sanctioned with government backed legislation that is anti-woman, although it becomes increasingly so as the Reagan administration and its appointees are more entrenched in the making of policy. Moreover, many of today's conservative policies come up against the variety of progressive counterforces that demand and push for equal rights and equal treatment of women. Finally, rather than attempts to get women out of paid employment, which was the rhetoric of the Depression, there appear to be increasing attempts to "put women back in their place" during the current economic crisis--their place being a subordinate position to men whether in the labor force or at home.

Policies that smack of attempts to "put women back in their place" during the current crisis include: (1) attempts to recriminalize abortion; (2) attempts to make wives obedient to their husbands as advocated by campaigns of the "moral majority," or to make women subservient to men in all aspects of life as proposed in Senator Denton's Family Protection Act; (3) attempts to channel women out of their hard-won but minimal positions in higher level male-dominated professions and skilled jobs (such as through "fetal" protection legislation for employed pregnant or "potentially" pregnant women--but only in high paying male dominated jobs--like oil, lead, and chemicals industries--and not in low paying dangerous female dominated jobs--like nursing); and (4) the most recent attempts by the government to gut both

affirmative action and civil rights legislation. (While I will briefly elaborate on items 1 and 4 below, further discussions of these trends can be found in Sokoloff, 1982).

In the first case, for example, conservatives are working hard to eliminate women's rights to abortion. This particularly affects white and middle class women since poorer women are already limited in their ability to obtain abortions through restrictions on federal funding through Medicaid for abortions. The other side of the coin is that poor women of color have been forced to have or to "choose" sterilization with the government paying up to 90 percent for a poor woman's sterilization and nothing for an abortion (CARASA, 1979). Just as the lower birth rate among the most educated white women alarmed eugenicists in the 1930s, it is not unheard of to think that sociobiologists or the various conservative philosophers today might want well educated career women to have children "for the sake of the society." [See, for example, Singapore's new policy and incentives for educated women to have children and careers, while poor and less educated women are encouraged to be sterilized ("Singapore Is Urging the Educated to Multiply," 1984).]

The tendency would not be to "push women back in the home" necessarily, but to remind women that, <u>whatever their employment situation</u>, their primary responsibility is to family and home. (Again, this is not without great controversy and challenge by many liberal and progressive forces today.) The pressures on employed women, especially mothers, are enormous today. Without adequate social supports (adequate day care, reasonable work hours, after school programs, stores open at hours the women can shop, etc.), mothers are expected to do everything

and do it well. If they don't, it is usually assumed that something is wrong with the women, not the way society is organized. Interestingly, this is precisely how Scharf (1980) explains the anger at married women teachers for their employment in the 1930s: they were castigated, she argues, far more for their refusal to play their expected roles (based on the fear that if they were employed they would not do their work at home and would not bear enough children to outweigh the number of children born to poorly educated and minority women) than at their "taking jobs away from men"--which we have said repeatedly women did not do.

One more example of how women are being chastised for whatever advances they have made, thus teaching them that woman's "place" is still subordinate in our society, is through a series of attacks by the Reagan administration on a variety of hard fought for protections for women, working class people, poor people and people of color. These include attacks against Equal Employment Opportunities Commission, Women's Educational Equity Act, Vocational Educational Amendments with far-reaching sex equity provisions, Title IX and all kinds of affirmative action rulings, our right to teach children with non-sexist and nonracist materials (e.g., see the Laxalt Bill), along with basic provisions in welfare, CETA jobs, food stamps, WIC program, busing for integration and quality education, the Voting Rights Act for black citizens and the composition and goals of the Civil Rights Commission.

Even though the many areas of women's lives are interconnected, since we are talking about the effects of the economic crisis on women's employment today, we will focus on how affirmative action policy/guide-

lines have come to blatantly and covertly support discrimination by the government against employed women.[15] The situation is summarized in the following statement by Powers (1984): "The Reagan administration has moved to cripple the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) and paralyze affirmative action, and in the process has given the private sector the not-so-subtle message that they needn't worry too much about hiring women and minorities, and that they can even ignore laws that are on the books" (Powers, 1984, p. 44).[16]

The EEOC has responsibility for enforcing laws preventing discrimination in employment. Even before the Reagan administration, when it supported women and minorities in important cases (such as against AT&T in a massive victory for women in early 1970s), it was chronically underfunded and understaffed. With the Reagan administration, the situation got increasingly worse to the point that in 1982 the EEOC could not conduct business for one-third of the year because it lacked the needed number of commissioners for a quorum, not to mention the inadequate number of enforcement agents.[17]

A second body, the OFCCP, administers the federal government's affirmative action policy according to guidelines set by the Department of Labor. Whatever the merits or demerits of these original guidelines, the Reagan administration has twice proposed new rules for federal contractors (businesses and agencies that have contracts with the federal government) that would severely weaken the effectiveness of affirmative action guidelines and encourage discrimination against women and minorities on the job. The effect of these proposals would be to exempt 75% of contractors and 80% of universities from even filing

affirmative action plans in order to get government funding. For those remaining few units required to file an affirmative action (AA) plan pledging not to discriminate against women and minorities, no federal agency would review the AA plan before the contract was awarded; and once such a review occurred, the institution would be exempt from further review for 5 years (Huber, 1981). Although the administration has never imposed these new guidelines (perhaps because of the outrage generated when they are suggested), the effect has been to let employers know that AA can effectively be ignored by them.

The Justice Department's Civil Rights Division files suit for the federal government in discrimination cases. It seems to be leading the retreat from enforcement of antidiscrimination laws. Minorities have felt its negative impact the most. However, women will be affected by the Justice Department's changes in policies on job discrimination cases. William Bradford Reynolds, head of the Civil Rights Division, announced (1) the division no longer files class action suits, but treats on-the-job bias suits on a case by case basis, (2) the focus of suits will be on whether the company intended to discriminate, not whether in fact it has the effect of discriminating against women and minorities, (3) opposition to goals and timetables to determine employers' progress in eliminating discrimination, (4) opposition to the Supreme Court's ruling allowing employers to set voluntary quotas and (5) strenuous opposition to so-called "reverse discrimination."

The most recent weakening of the law to protect women from institutionalized discrimination was the Supreme Court ruling of the Grove City (Pa.) College case in February (1984) (Greenhouse, 1984a). In this instance, the increasingly conservative Court struck down all

earlier lower Court interpretations implying that an entire institution could not discriminate against women even if federal money was only going to one department of that institution. Now, instead of bringing an entire college, in this case, before the law if it discriminates, each unit of the school must be brought forward and challenged separately. In just two months since the Supreme Court's decision, "at least four universities have been relieved from discrimination suits in direct response to the Grove City ruling" (as quoted in Pear, 1984, p. B18). (N.B. Legislation is being introduced to counteract this ruling. Pear, 1984c; Fields, 1984).

Many other individual issues that will negatively affect women have been brought up or supported by the Reagan administration and its appointees. Some, like the Grove City case change the law to actively allow and encourage discrimination against women; others, like the attempt to make Title IX protect only women students and not women faculty and staff from discrimination have failed. The point, however, is that the continual challenges by Reagan and his administration directly and indirectly support an atmosphere that creates increased opportunities for discrimination against women today--not unlike some of the active government intervention against women that existed in the Depression.

This is reinforced by the newly constituted Civil Rights Commission, which, until Reagan eliminated most of its members who disagreed with him on affirmative action, was highly critical of his civil rights policies.[18] As Linda Chavez, the new staff director appointed by Reagan, has proposed: there should be "major program changes emphasizing possible adverse effects of affirmative action,

racial quotas, bilingual education and busing as a means of school desegregation" (Pear, 1984a, p. 4E). (My underlining.)

In all of this, I want to emphasize, the Reagan administration sees itself as proposing what they perceive as the "best" policies for a most efficient economy which will be better for everyone. In the long run, they argue, women, minorities and poor people will be best served by a growing economy, which can only occur, in their words, if excessive regulations (like affirmative action, racial quotas, etc.) are eliminated, which they believe impede the efficient operation of the institution and create an economic downturn. In fact, the government argues today, it is staunchly against discrimination on the basis of race and sex--and most especially in cases of so-called "reverse discrimination." As William Bradford Reynolds said in defending the Justice Department's support of white male firefighters and police in Birmingham, Alabama claiming "reverse discrimination:" "...if there is an allegation of discrimination, the Government's responsibility under the law is to come in and say we're against discrimination on account of race (or sex). We always side with those people who claim they have suffered discrimination on account of race (or sex)" (as quoted in Pear, 1984b, p. A15).

In this sense, the situation is different than during the Depression when the rhetoric was openly anti-woman. Moreover, there is considerable mainstream opposition to Reagan's policies. Today the effect of Reagan administration and government policies is to the detriment of women, while the rhetoric itself may be less directly anti-woman. In fact, there is an attempt to woo women voters in the Reagan camp because of the "gender gap:" the loss of votes by Republicans from

women who do not support conservative, militaristic, and anti-woman legislation. In light of this fact and the greater integration of women in the labor market, the anti-woman rhetoric might be expected to be less prevalent than during the Depression, even though it certainly still exists. Let us look specifically at the ideological campaigns which try to blame women and women's employment for many of the problems emerging in each of the two periods of economic crisis under discussion.

Blaming Women's Employment for Economic Crisis

In this section I want to argue that, on the one hand, women in today's economic crisis face hostility in many ways similar to that of women during the Depression. On the other hand, it is important to recognize the different ways in which that hostility is expressed in the two periods and how the somewhat less virulent ideological attacks against women today belie structural disadvantages very detrimental to women in today's economic crisis.

Thus, a major similarity between the Depression and the 1970s-1980s economic crisis can be seen in the familiar charges that are brought against women then and now: women are said to not need jobs as much as men do; they are charged with usurping jobs that "rightfully" belong to men; and they are said to artificially inflate unemployment statistics because what is "real" is male unemployment, not female unemployment.

During the Depression, New York Assemblyperson Arthur Swartz announced in 1931, employment of married women was "reprehensible." He admonished "our federal, state and local government (to) cooperate to remove these undeserving 'parasites'" (as quoted in Scharf, 1980, p. 45, my underlinings). Or, as Norman Cousins offered in the frequently

repeated overly simplistic panacea: "There are approximately 10,000,000 people out of work in the United States today (1939)...; there are also 10,000,000 or more women, married and single, who are jobholders. Simply fire the women, who shouldn't be working anyway, and hire the men. Presto! No unemployment. No relief rolls. No depression" (as quoted in Kessler-Harris, 1982, p. 256). While married women were the new interlopers in the job market in the 1920s and 1930s, married women and those with children--especially young children--occupy that position in the current economic crisis. In fact, by the 1970s, mothers were more likely to be in the labor force than married women without children ("Marital and Family Patterns of Workers: An Update," 1982).

The attack against married women's employment today is admittedly less virulent than in the Depression. Moreover, although women are often blamed for high unemployment rates today, not only do they play a more active and accepted role in the labor force, but there is far less talk about "sending women back home." (See pages 1 and 2 above for a variety of reasons why this contradiction might exist.) This is so, in part, because, as Marilyn Powers argues, "...the fact is that women's production work in the home is no longer available for them to do... (which means) they can be unemployed, of course, or employed temporarily or sporadically, but they cannot, in any meaningful numbers, just be sent 'home'..." (1983, p. 83). In addition, even the substitution of women's unwaged home labor for goods and services formerly purchased in the marketplace is a more limited strategy for survival today than in the Depression.[19] Thus, certain skills, like home sewing or bread-making, are more fully integrated in the commodity market where a mass produced dress or loaf of bread is cheaper to buy than to sew by hand or

bake at home. Also, the running of most homes is completely dependent on purchased forms of energy: you can no longer choose to cook over a wood-burning stove as a rule. As Milkman (1976) concludes, "Women might 'take up the slack' in the economy again in a 1970s depression, but the job will be more difficult, and they may be less willing to do it" (p. 93).

Most importantly, I want to suggest, the hostile but less virulent attacks against women for high rates of unemployment stem in large part not from the attempt to make women believe they should necessarily go back home, but to prevent women from thinking they can move into better, higher waged traditionally male jobs in the economy (which was certainly part of the ideology of affirmative action pre-Reagan) or can struggle for wages more equal to men (i.e., comparable worth) even though employed in traditionally sex segregated jobs.[20] While in the Depression hostility was addressed specifically against women's employment, in today's economic crisis the hostility is against women's advancement out of their "traditional place" both in the labor market and at home and less so their employment per se--although this is certainly an important basis of some of the New Right philosophy.

In short, one of the major differences today from the Depression is the attempt to force women "back down" the occupational hierarchy, as much as or rather than to force women "out"--to go home. At home, the goal is to maintain or reassert women's tradicional domestic, child-care, and husband-care responsibilities whether she they also work for wages or not. These are two different versions, I would argue, of teaching women to "know their place," the broader goal of the current economic crisis.

Nevertheless, despite these important differences, the high unemployment rates of men today are often said to be due in large part to women's increased employment. This argument is espoused by economists and government officials despite the fact that today, as well as during the Depression, women and men are employed in highly sex segregated labor markets and therefore do not generally compete for each others' jobs (see Milkman, 1976; Urquhart, 1984).

Thus, during the 1975 downturn, we are told that "more women are competing for jobs than ever before, driving up the unemployment rate." In fact, today, women are not only attacked for taking jobs away from men as was done in the 1930s, but they are in addition more likely to be seen as artificially inflating the unemployment figures. The argument here is that including women in the employment/unemployment figures gives the impression that things are worse than they really are, since the unemployment rate would be lower if only male heads of households (the so-called legitimate labor force participants) were the only ones to be counted in the unemployment statistics.

For example, Alfred Tella, a special advisor to the Census Bureau under Reagan, contends that

> recent workplace trends have inflated the unemployment rate by as much as 2.5 percentage points since the 1960s, when the rate was considered a measure of how many male heads of households were looking for work. For example, Mr. Tella says, the women and teenagers who are new to the work force shop around for more attractive positions[21], often leaving jobs after short periods, and thus have relatively high unemployment rates (Serrin, 1981, p. 9).[22]

Jo Freeman summarizes in the following quote several contemporary arguments charging women at least partial responsibility for the current economic crisis. These comments were made during the Carter administration, even before the height of unemployment of almost 11 percent

nationwide was reached in the Reagan administration.

> Many economists conclude that the increase in women's participation in the labor force, particularly among married women, can at least partially account for both higher inflation and unemployment.
>
> They argue that married women who "don't really have to work" tell government interviewers that they are looking for jobs when they are actually quite picky about what work they will accept. They argue that because women do not provide the major economic support for the family, a particular unemployment rate does not indicate the same degree of national hardship as it has done in the past. Furthermore, married women, who don't really "have to" work, are even accused of taking jobs away from married men who do, making an additional contribution to the unemployment rate.
>
> Employed women are less often blamed for inflation than for unemployment, but some economists note that married women's contributions to family incomes increase the number of dollars families can spend. More dollars without a concomitant increase in productivity is attributed as a major cause of inflation (Freeman, 1979, pp. 3-4).

More recently, it has been suggested, the Reagan administration can justify its incredibly high rates of unemployment with its so-called economic recovery strategies by arguing, in part, that "women are a higher proportion of the labor force now; women are considered to have a 'naturally' higher unemployment rate than men because of their weaker attachment to the labor force" (Powers, 1984, p. 49).

Finally, in 1982, when women's unemployment rates for the first time since World War II were lower than men's unemployment rates (USDL, BLS, 1980; Monthly Labor Review, 1983), Reagan gently, but nevertheless quite directly, castigated women for the rise of unemployment during his administration: "Part of the unemployment is not so much recession as it is the great increase in the people going into the job market, and ladies, I'm not picking on anyone, but because of the increase in women who are working today and two-worker families and so forth" ("Jobless Rate Tied to Big Work Force," 1982, p. 37).

While it is true that today's scapegoats include white male organized labor and foreign competition (Milkman, 1983), it still seems to me that women are also used as scapegoats for today's economic problems. The anti-female ideology today seems to be saying that: "most women work today; they work full-time and have made tremendous advances in the job market--many, yes too many, of these advances gotten unfairly, it is argued, because of affirmative action which is alleged to have discriminated against white males." (For the latest version of such "backlash," see Pear, 1984b). Moreover, to the degree that people uncritically accept the argument that women have made great advances (and surely women have made important advances), this successfully obscures women's continued sex segregation, low wages and limited mobility, continued lack of power, inadequate less than year-round and full-time employment when she wants/needs it, and threat to her employment by increasing automation and rationalization of women's work (see Sokoloff, 1980, 1982, 1983, 1984; Powers, 1984).

Not only are employed married women falsely castigated for "taking jobs away" from men, but they are blamed for the disruption, instability, and disintegration of family life. Scharf (1980) reports how in the 1930s unruly children and demoralized husbands who could not find employment were said to be the outcome of the wife/mother's employment. As one man lamented: "I would rather turn on the gas and put an end to the whole family than let my wife support me" (Scharf, 1980, p. 141). (Also see here, Nisonoff, 1984, for a summary of studies on impact of plant closings during the Depression on women and families.)

Despite the fact that in both the Depression and the downturn of the 1980s a decline in the divorce rate occurs ("Divorce Appears to Dip

with Economy," 1982; "US Divorce Fell in '82...," 1983), high divorce rates in the current 1970s-1980s period are often blamed on women's employment.[23] George Gilder (1981), a widely quoted spokesperson for the Reagan administration's philosophy of life, argues that poor people are poor because they lack the three important ingredients to success in a capitalist society: work, family, and faith. The family is the patriarchal nuclear family, with a male head of household and an economically dependent female homemaker who is seen as a necessary incentive for the male's motivation to work. His most virulent attack is saved for the female headed black family and the welfare system which is accused of making "optional the male provider role" (Gilder, 1981, pp. 70-72, 140, 148). As Powers (1984) concludes in her analysis of Gilder, "Thus any option that allows women to live independently of men is undesirable, and in fact causes poverty, urban decay, and crime" (pp. 41-42).

Further, just as in the Depression when traditional husband-wife families were forced to resort to the wife's employment because the husband was unemployed (Komarovsky, 1940; Elder, 1974; see Cherlin, 1981), this type of "role reversal" today is associated with the demoralization of the men and children in the family. As Milkman (1983) concludes about the men and women themselves:

> In both periods, the "role reversals" tend to reinforce traditional roles rather than encouraging egalitarianism, since the situation is primarily associated with deprivation. The unemployed men in this situation are typically desperate to resume the breadwinner role, while their wives face pressures from several conflicting directions, wanting both to increase their earnings and to maintain their marriages (p. 10).[24]

Not only is this role reversal said to be deleterious for the husband and conflicting for the wife, it is also bad for the children.

In a study done by a group of researchers at the University of Michigan, the example was given of how a child who had formerly done well in school began to have tantrums and severely lowered grades as his father was laid off and stayed home from work while his mother went off to work (reported in Pines, 1982). In the hands of Gilder and other New Right conservatives[25] this could easily be translated into: the mother should stay home and take care of her family and/or the economy should be in such a state as to allow the father to work and the mother to "properly" take care of her husband and children.

Finally, in both periods, educated white women are encouraged to stay home (at least for a while) and have more children (especially more than one child today) in order to protect the country against the racist fears of poor and especially minority women's higher birth rates as well as to bring up their children "appropriately"--with the "correct" class, racial and sex stereotyped biases and behaviors. As Scharf (1980) argues for the earlier period, foreign-born women bore twice as many children as native-born white women with college-graduates' birth rate the lowest of all. "This phenomenon was blamed, in large measure, on the perception that these educated women continued to work after marriage. "'Married, they refuse to be mothers; mistresses of the home, they refuse to be housewives.' All of which could only result in the 'overthrow of the family, the destruction of humanity'" (p. 18).

Today, it seems to me, there appears a sigh of relief that highly educated, white middle class women over 30 are deciding to have children. A sperm bank for men with genius IQs has been set up by a conservative nobel prize winner to ensure the "intelligent" perpetuation of the species. And, as has already happened in Singapore, it is not

unthinkable that certain conservative groups in the U.S. would argue that

> it is wrong for highly educated women to remain single (or married with no children), potentially robbing the nation of a talented generation vital to maintaining... (the country's) prosperity.... An indication of things to come emerged ...when the Government announced that well-educated mothers would have priority in enrolling their children in the best schools. The less educated who agree to sterilization after their first or second child will have next preference ("Singapore Is Urging the Educated to Multiply," 1984, p. 21).

IV. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this paper has examined two areas where the impact of economic crises on women's employment in the Depression and 1970s-1980s appear to be similar: first, the actual changes in female employment and second, the ideological campaigns and policies generated and/or reinforced especially by the federal government blaming women for male unemployment--if not the crisis itself.

In the first instance, we learn that in both periods of economic crisis, women's employment, especially that of married women and/or mothers, increases despite increasingly high unemployment rates and all propaganda campaigns to the contrary. The numerical increase, however, does not carry with it a commensurate increase in status, pay and power for women. On the contrary, as the secular trend expands female employment in low pay, sex segregated, part-time service sector and clerical jobs, it does so by pushing women farther down the occupational hierarchy during these two economic crises.

In the second instance, while hostility is expressed against married women and mothers of young children for taking jobs away from men (and single women) who allegedly deserve them more, this hostility is expressed in different ways. During the Great Depression, propaganda campaigns and government intervention pushed for women to leave the labor force altogether--despite the actual increase in female employment. In the 1970s-1980s, as over three-fifths of all adult women (18-64 years old) were employed, the message was far more one of "putting women back in their place"--a subordinate position to men whether in the labor force or at home.

Thus, the apparent contradiction between increasing female employment and an ideology that does not support it, at least for today's economic crisis, may be explained in part by the contradictory demands that women are needed in the economy at the same time they are needed in the family.

The hostility against women's employment or against women "doing better" is, in part, to blame for the upheavals perceived in the family itself at the same time that women have to work for wages as the value of their husband's "family wage" is eroded.[26] This contradiction is handled, at least in part, by the part-time (or less than full-time and year-round) nature of female employment, which maintains and reinforces women's primary identity and responsibility with the family, all the while tying women more and more to the waged labor force--but with low wage, insecure, unstable, part-time jobs with little or no benefits and encourage high turnover and easy replacability. It is interesting to note that both government legislation and propaganda campaigns against women's employment or those that try to justify the demotion of women further down the job hierarchy are carried on all the while that more and more women are employed. Today this is true as more women (and men) than ever before have successfully entered some of the most prestigious male dominated professions since the 1970s (see Sokoloff, 1984).

Finally, hostility against women "doing better" in the job market during the 1970s-1980s, is likewise, in part, to blame women not only for upheavals perceived in the family, but, as one might expect, in the labor market as it is transformed during the economic crisis itself. The huge number and percent of women in the labor force and the diffusion of many feminist ideas throughout large sectors of the society

help, in part, to put a break on the most explicit forms of attack against women today. The increasingly conservative forces of the current economic crisis are continually forced to more indirect and partial attacks against women by strong counterpressures. It is by being alert to both the similarities and the differences and by learning from our past--in this case the Depression--that we may hope to move forward from our current economic crisis.

FOOTNOTES

1. In reviewing the Scharf (1980) book I found at least 3 ways in which economic crises impacted on women's lives during the Depression that appeared similar to today to me: In addition to the effects of the economic crises on women's employment and the types of charges made against women for being employed, there was also the reactions of mainstream feminist movements to the economic crises. I focus on the first two because of space limitations.

   In addition, the initial book from which I got many of my ideas about the Depression focused on married women, particularly educated, white married women who were involved in the teaching profession. My own comments are more general and tend to focus on the wider range of women's labor force experiences under the impact of economic hardship.

2. Milkman (1976) says that female unemployment increased to 7.5 percent, not 14 percent, in 1940--although she also adds that figures for the period are probably an underestimate for women. Even at 7.5 percent female unemployment, however, this represents almost a doubling of female unemployment between 1930 and 1940.

3. It is interesting to note that even homework--i.e., waged labor done in the home, e.g., sewing--follows the general trends in the economy. Contrary to what is typically expected, home work goes down during the Depression and the current period of crisis in the 1980s and up in prosperity. Thus, it is traditionally expected that women pick up slack in family income by intensifying paid home work during an economic crisis. On the contrary, recent research findings indicate that as factories close and women lose jobs in waged labor outside the home during economic crises, the opportunities for paid homework likewise diminish. This makes the lives of many poor and working class women even harder than had been thought in the past (see Johnson and Johnson, 1984).

4. For a general picture of the increasing secular trend of female employment, including married women's and mothers' employment, see J.W. Scott, 1982; Matthaei, 1982; USDL, BLS, 1980; Hayghe, 1983. For a look at Black women's experiences, see Engram, 1981; Helmbold, 1981; Scharf, 1980; Wallace, 1980; USDL, BLS, 1980.

5. Scharf's (1980) focus is on how traditional female professionals (service workers) were recruited in large part because there was a "demand for growing numbers of workers necessary to meet new social needs at the lowest possible costs" (p. 10). Later she provides data on women throughout the job hierarchy but this appears to be only of secondary concern to her there.

6. Not everyone interprets this process during the Depression as a disadvantage for women. Kessler-Harris (1982) argues the Depression "benefitted" women (1) because women were not employed in the hardest hit "male" industries, (2) because women were employed in those industries (clerical and service) experiencing a secular increase, and (3) because women were employed in jobs that were becoming more rationalized. However, while certainly this means that women benefitted by being employed in larger numbers, it does not mean that women benefitted in the sense that they did not experience downward mobility overall. The point, of course, is to understand the contradictory nature of the process of the inclusion of women into the labor force over time and in particular during specific periods of economic crisis.

7. Data in Scharf (1980) supports this conclusion, although she herself does not make this argument. (See my review of Scharf, Sokoloff, forthcoming.)

8. 1980 data show the following: there is a greater increase of women in the male dominated professions in 1980 than in 1970--along with a sharp increase of men in these same professions. These changes are as much, I would argue, due to the rationalization of the professions (and thus downgrading of professions) as they are to the political and economic forces operating on the professions (Sokoloff, 1984). Thus, as one set of authors have argued for women increasing in the male dominated professions today: women's recent progress in the professions can be understood in terms of the fact that "...Women Get a Ticket to Ride After the Gravy Train Has Left the Station" (Carter and Carter, 1981).

9. Feldberg, the discussant for this panel on "Lessons from the Depression," mentions the study by Ellen Rosen on textile and electronics workers. See e.g., Rosen, 1982.

10. PRELIMINARY DATA. Occupational Distribution of Men and Women (White), WITHIN the Professional/Technical/ Kindred Category, 1970 and 1980

	1970		1980	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Male Dominated Prof.*	80.6%	40.2%	69.1%	31.3%
Female Dominated Prof.	5.6%	53.4%	11.3%	52.1%
Male Technicians	12.8%	2.4%	18.0%	6.6%
Female Technicians	1.0%	3.9%	1.6%	10.1%
	100.0%	99.9%	100.0%	100.1%

*Male Dominated Elite Professions are divided into Elite and Non-Elite Male Professions. When this is done, the following obtain for Elite Male Professionals in 1970: 50% white men, 10.1% white women; in 1980: 40.3% white men, 10.8% white women. Sources: For 1970, Almquist, 1979, p. 144; for 1980, U.S. Dept. of Commerce, 1980. (Please note these data are preliminary and unchecked and should not be used without first speaking to Natalie J. Sokoloff). (See Sokoloff, 1984).

11. Refer back to footnote 8. On the one hand we know that there has been a significant numerical increase of women in elite male professions (see e.g., Epstein, 1983, for women in law; Herbers, 1983). On the other hand, we also know both statistical manipulations and rationalization of professional labor help explain why this progress is much more limited than the numbers indicate (Sokoloff, 1984). The lack of progress indicated by above data might be explained in part by the fact that expansion in these areas, such as law and medicine occurred not only for women but for men as well.

12. This does not deal with the issue of whether and how certain groups of women (e.g., black and other women of color) act as a reserve of labor for the white female labor force during an economic crisis.

13. As was noted earlier, it has been argued that the 1920s showed an increasingly hard time for women which continued into the 1930s (Humphries, 1976). However, actual data for the 1920s is very poor.

14. Between 1960 and 1978 the percent of women employed full-time and year-round has increased by only 7 percent (from 37% to 44%). The places of greatest female employment increases in the 1980s are heavily LESS THAN year-round and full-time in 1978: especially sales, clerical, and service work. For further discussion, see Sokoloff, 1981, 1983. See table below:

	Percent Employed Women Who Work Year-Round & Full-Time in 1978
Professional-Technical	54*
Manager-Administrator	66
Sales	26
Clerical	51
Craft	49
Operatives, incl. Transport	44
Nonfarm Laborers	31
Service (not incl. pvte. hhld)	28
Private Household Service	12
Farm	22
TOTAL	44

Source: U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, 1980, Table 19.

*This should be read: 54 percent of all women employed as Professional and Technical workers work both full-time and year-round in 1978. Therefore, 46% do not.

15. Women's progress in the last 20 years, especially since the impact of affirmative action and civil rights movements, has been both positive and negative. Certainly, the image in the mass media has been that women have done very well both in terms of numbers and quality of employment. In the last several years, in fact, there have been a number of front-page articles in such papers as the New York Times asserting that women have made tremendous inroads into more preferred high status and high pay male jobs in the professions, management, and skilled crafts (e.g., see Herbers, 1983). However, I want to make clear, first, while some progress has certainly been made, it is nowhere as widespread as the media splashes would make us believe. Second, one must evaluate such claims within the context of an expanding economy in the 1960s and early 1970s. What happens as that economy contracts--as has been occurring over the past decade? And third, evidence for the horrendous impact on women from Reagan administration policies counteract much of the otherwise more hopeful pieces that hit the front page of the newspapers. E.g., see Powers, 1984.

16. Unless otherwise indicated, the review of issues around affirmative action is adapted from Powers, 1984, pp. 43-47.

17. In January 1982, the Labor Department was reported to be expected to lay off 35% of OFCCP staff, effectively making enforcement impossible.

18. See ACLU report, "In Contempt of Congress and the Courts," accusing the "Justice Department of failing to uphold civil rights statutes and even trying to weaken them..." ("Reagan Criticized on Rights," 1984, p. A10).

19. This is true despite the fact that women still "pick up the slack" during the current crisis by intensifying their unpaid home labor (Weinbaum and Bridges, 1976).

20. This is obviously a complex problem since simultaneous with the weakening of government enforced affirmative action legislation by the Reagan administration, a variety of positive decisions are occurring for women and minorities. For example, General Motors approved an impressive voluntary affirmative action plan for its workers despite administration disapproval of these types of policies. (Pear, 1983b). Most recently the Supreme Court ruled that women and minorities competing for partnerships in law firms were covered by civil rights laws (Greenhouse, 1984b).

21. Along with this kind of analysis are the biased assumptions that when men look around for better jobs, they are praised for trying to advance themselves; women and teens, on the other hand, are seen as being more frivolous, less attached to the market, and thus are castigated for the very same behavior (Oppenheimer, 1970; Simpson and Simpson, 1969).

22. Note that this is said when national unemployment was at 7.3 percent (N = 7.7 million workers) and New York City's unemployment was 10.5%--in April, 1981 (see Stetson, 1981).

23. For an analysis of long-term secular trends in marriage and divorce, see Cherlin, 1981.

24. An alternative reaction, of course, is the weakening of traditional sex roles and an appreciation by unemployed men of women's arduous domestic tasks as they take on household and childcare tasks when their wives find paid employment. (See Moroney, 1984).

25. One should not assume that Reagan's philosophy is synonymous with that of the New Right. In fact, both the Old Right and the New Right influence Reagan and his policies, which often are in conflict with one another (see Pincus, 1984, as he explores this issue with regard to education policies during the Reagan administration). Powers (1984) reminds us of this in terms of policies relating to women.

26. Some women, of course, are totally on their own supporting themselves and their families--as female-headed families increase in numbers, especially among poorer and minority women (see Cummings, 1983; "One-Parent Families Singled Out for Trouble," 1983).

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